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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

Letter dated 3 May 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the address made by H. E. Mr. Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 21 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Anatoli M. ZLENKO
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
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* A/51/50.

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ANNEX

Address made by H. E. Mr. Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine, on 26 April 1996 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe

Chernobyl is an intolerable pain and incurable wound of the Ukrainian people, a symbol of the global disaster that knows no distance or borders.

On the tragic day in April 1986, when the most widespread and horrifying technological and ecological catastrophe in the history of mankind took place, we, in fact, began a new count of time.

Chernobyl cannot be referred to in the past tense. It is a longstanding and universal tragedy.

For 10 years we have lived under the bitter Chernobyl star suffering, some of us to a greater, some of us to a lesser extent. And to all of us, at this time, the alarming sound of Chernobyl's bells have been warning about the danger of the uncontrolled atom.

Therefore today, on the International Memorial Day of Chernobyl, we bow in deep sorrow and pay respect to the pure souls of those who, without hesitation, stepped into the nuclear hell, protecting us with their bodies from the unpredictable, saving the Earth.

The world must not and has no right to forget their sacrifice, their great heroic deed for the sake of mankind.

Immeasurable is our gratitude to those who, in order to eliminate the consequences of the nuclear disaster, risking their health, entered the unknown to tame the merciless elements capable of destroying in a matter of hours life on Earth. In Ukraine alone there are 350,000 of them. And numerous representatives of other peoples did the same. Many of them are no longer alive.

Today we also remember those of our compatriots who, within no time, found themselves smothered by the heavy dusk of the ominous Chernobyl shadow that uprooted and drove them from the land of their ancestors, making them face the bitterness of resettlement in new locations.

We express our sincere gratitude to the States, international organizations and tens of thousands of foreign citizens who rendered their support to Ukraine at its time of trial and are assisting us today; to all those who right from the start were aware of what had really happened on 26 April 1986.

This is especially important because from the very beginning the unprecedented disaster was aggravated by lies and misinformation about its causes, scale and consequences.

In fact, Ukraine has become a zone of environmental disaster, which it has had to face all alone after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the Chernobyl disaster has turned into an allegedly "sovereign" private affair of the Ukrainian people.

Facing severe economic problems affiliated with the process of building an independent State and drastically reforming the fundamentals of our life we have to deny ourselves the basics and spend 12 per cent of our State budget to "cure" the Chernobyl "disease" and its consequences.

Within the past four years, more than $3 billion has been released for this purpose, which is five times greater than the total allocations for education, health and culture.

This burden is beyond the capabilities of Ukraine. Besides, it is not known for how long our people will have to carry this heavy cross.

The global character of the disaster requires adequate attention and specific assistance in overcoming its consequences on the part of the international community. What is at stake is not only our destiny, but also the future of mankind.

This is how Ukraine's position was brought to the attention of the leaders of the seven major industrialized countries by the President of Ukraine on 20 April at Moscow.

More than $3 billion will be allocated to implement the political decision of Ukraine to shut down the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and to solve the whole spectrum of related problems.

Moreover, a decision will be adopted on financing the construction of a new sarcophagus by the G-7 countries and by the European community.

What made this possible was, first, Ukraine's political course which, through practical measures, substantially reduced the nuclear pressure on our planet providing for the strengthening of international security.

Secondly, though it is hard to admit, it was the Chernobyl disaster that made the world more sensitive to the troubles of individual countries and made us realize how mutually dependent we are on one another, being a single whole.

Thus, we are now entering the stage at which mutual support, joint efforts and collective wisdom of peoples will become a reliable guarantee that present and future generations will not suffer a similar tragedy.

As has always been the case at the time of hard trials, our people have responded to the Chernobyl disaster with courage and self-sacrifice, endurance and immeasurable patience.

Thanks to you and to all people of good will, life on our planet has been saved. Much has been done, and much more is to be done to make sure that the "shining" sarcophagus, the dead-land zone and the radiation-fertilized soil are not the only symbols of Ukraine that we are going to leave as our legacy.

I believe in our people, in their wisdom, in their inexhaustible potential for life.

I am confident that we will overcome everything while creating a prosperous and thriving Ukraine.

I bow down to you, my dear compatriots, for staying undaunted in the face of disaster, for your will to life and for your confidence in the bright future of our Motherland.